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Looking back at what has been happening ON university campuses since 1963, one may become concerned about what may happen TO the institutions involved. There is nothing immutable or sacrosanct about the way colleges and universities are organized and operated, but they must be able to resist pressures for changes that would threaten their integrity and distinction as centers of higher learning. The common theory that the university is a social microcosm is erroneous. It is a specialized community and should not be viewed as a stage for partisan politics or be expected to reflect the interests of each of its members. It is necessary to protect the university from becoming an agency for offsetting inadequacies that stem from other sources such as poverty, criminality, unemployment, and urban blight, for while it provides distinctive functions in its services to society, it cannot be expected to direct its attention to all social problems. Neither can it survive as a battleground for organized disruptions, collective bargaining and other tactics, nor as a haven for escapist students and overly permissive young faculty. Where reform is needed, dialogue should replace negotiation between the parties concerned, for the traditional testing of ideas must not degenerate into a conflict which destroys academic freedom. If academic freedom is to be preserved, student duties must be considered along with student rights, and responsibilities kept in balance with privileges. (WM)

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# The Abuses of the University

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American Council on Education

Commencement Address, March 10, 1968

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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# The Abuses of the University

ALMOST FIVE YEARS have gone by since the publication of Clark Kerr's provocative book, *The Uses of the University*. His Foreword stated that he was not mainly concerned with the *misuses* of the university, and that his title implied "a generally optimistic tone." Although I do not intend my remarks to you on this occasion to imply a generally pessimistic tone, I believe that disturbing occurrences since 1963 are alarming enough to warrant our attention to "The Abuses of the University." All of us here are concerned, I am sure, not only with what happens within and around the nation's campuses, but also with what may happen *to* our institutions of higher learning.

Let me begin by expressing confidence in the viability of American higher education. Our belief in the importance of colleges and universities is witnessed in our establishment and maintenance of more than 2,300 of them. Nine antedate the founding of our nation and, compared to other social agencies, institutions of higher education are remarkably tough and durable organisms. Even so, colleges and universities can wither away for want of understanding or support, or we can so maim their structures and functions as to render them incapable of serving their basic purposes.

Their structures and functions, we should remind ourselves, have been evolved over a long period of time, and it is doubtful that their purposes are going to be changed overnight as a consequence of either committee recommendations or activist onslaughts. Moreover, as Caryl P. Haskins has recently pointed out, we need to be cautioned that, in social as in biological evolution, there is a limit to the rate at which change can take place. To be successful, innovations must not be severely disorienting. "As in biological evolution, effective social evolution must be at once radical and conservative, freely embracing the new, yet scrupulously preserving basic and well-tested elements that have had a high survival value in the past and which remain relevant to the present."

There is nothing immutable or sacrosanct, to be sure, about the ways in which contemporary universities are organized and operated. They have changed with the passage of time, and are the way they are today, not because of any conspiracy of governing boards, administrators, or

faculties, but because of their response to the logic of history and through their interplay with other parts of society. As a Canadian educator, J. E. Hodgetts, has mentioned, there is no need to conjure up "false dragons" to explain their shortcomings or to forget that at times "the unripe better is the enemy of the ripening good." To maintain their integrity as centers of higher learning, colleges and universities must manifest some continuity with the past and must be able to resist both inside and outside pressures that would distort their basic objectives and perhaps even destroy their greatest social utility.

In speaking to you today about the abuses to which our institutions seem to be increasingly exposed, I am not impugning the motives of all advocates of innovation. The well-intentioned friends of higher education vastly outnumber its avowed enemies, but, to refer to Louis Wright's salty comments in his last report from the Folger Library, shenanigans do get perpetrated in the name of "freedom of expression," and its more dim-witted defenders are sometimes unaware that they may be countenancing "the techniques of Ku Kluxers and Brown Shirts" on and around their campuses. This being so, I believe that all of us become a party to mayhem on the body of the university if we stand by as passive witnesses to its mutilation.

What I want to say to you, I should stress, is not intended as a defense of the *status quo* in American higher education but as an attack upon those abuses that in my judgment will denigrate the integrity and effectiveness of our universities if we do not speak out against them and take strong counteractions. To act intelligently, we must begin by identifying and uprooting erroneous ideas about what an institution of higher education is supposed to be and do. Although I am no longer in the thick of the campus fray, as a large number of you have been until these exercises are concluded, and as others among you will continue to be, I have gone through a variety of experiences as student, teacher, administrator, and trustee of more than a dozen different institutions. I hope to speak to you as a voice that represents both sympathy and detachment. In any event, you are a captive audience, and you have no option but to hear me out, as I set forth my personal views about four current misconceptions of the university and what to do about them.

1. *The University as a Microcosm.* The notion that the campus should replicate in miniature the larger community is not the worst current misconception, but it is a common one. As Merrimon Cuninggim mentioned in a recent and as yet unpublished paper, ". . . the university at its best is not merely a human community, it is a humane community." It differs from other types of human communities because of its focus on gaining, sharing, and using knowledge. Even though actual institu-

tions may fall short of the prototype, they are committed to the pursuit of truth and the dissemination of truth. This commitment in turn implies a measure of insulation from mundane affairs, a due regard for history and timelessness as well as for the here and now, and the right to criticize as well as serve the society that supports them. In the larger house of the whole social system, the university is intended to be a mansion of the intellect and not a sheltered roosting place, or a staging area for partisan political forces.

Members of the academic community, whether students, professors, administrators, or trustees, are involved, of course, in many of the affairs of the outside world, and much that goes on intramurally is highly relevant extramurally. The university is a special—rather than a general-purpose—community, however, and it should not be expected to express all the varied desires of its human components.

The relevance of what it tries to do is not necessarily tested by a direct and immediate relation to the burning civic issues of the day. To be viable, a university must be contemporaneous, to be sure, but its functioning as a main vehicle of civilization also means that transmitting the best that has been thought and said in the past must be a major a[illegible] Although its student members enjoy considerable freedom in choosing what they will study and in determining how they will use their extracurricular time, they should not have the illusion that the university is intended to resemble either a supermarket or a boutique. It is likewise preposterous to contend that each student generation can devise anew its own curriculum or construct its own ground rules for the advancement of learning.

The preoccupations of the university not only transcend the immediacies of time but also those of space, for, as the generic name of the institution implies, many of its concerns are universal rather than provincial. East Lansing, for example, is a community rooted in a particular place in Michigan and nowhere else, but Michigan State University as an intellectual community extends its influence throughout the world.

In view of the generally messy conditions prevailing in politics at home and abroad, I am at loss to understand why some persons feel that university affairs are best c[illegible]ted by all members of the academic community on a one-man one-vote basis. It is interesting to speculate what would happen to the faculty if, like political officeholders, they were hired and fired by vote of their principal constituents, the students. It is also interesting to ponder what the curriculum might be if some academic equivalent of the Nielsen rating system in television were used to determine which courses and professors were to be dropped, kept on, or given prime time—that is, time between 10 and 12 o'clock on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

I could go on at length with possible permutations and combinations that might stem from implementing erroneous notions about the university as a social microcosm, but the point to emphasize here is that if the university were not a special-purpose institution it really would have no excuse for being, and I suspect that most taxpayers and other benefactors would agree. Furthermore, we should not forget that a social price is exacted for the autonomy accorded such an institution. It is the requirement that it conduct its proper affairs in an orderly and productive way, with a reasonable expectation of ultimate payoff for society's investment.

You will recall that last year the California Supreme Court ruled on a case originating in Berkeley that "(The) University, as an academic community, can formulate its own standards, rewards, and punishments . . . . Thus, *in an academic community, greater freedoms and greater restrictions may prevail than in society at large,* and the subtle fixing of these limits should, in large measure, be left to the educational institution itself."

For the university to maintain its autonomy and distinctiveness as a place where the pursuit of truth and the advancement of learning have traditionally been shielded from outside intrusions, its members, I would add, not only must have high standards of conduct but also must live up to them. When they fail to do so, and deviant behavior takes such extreme forms that the police and the courts are required to maintain order and settle disputes, then autonomy is already giving way to heteronomy—and the university is indeed becoming a microcosm.

2. *The University as a Welfare Agency.* However erroneously, formal education is regarded increasingly as a panacea for most of our social and economic ills. It is in some respects unfortunate, therefore, that education is not a commodity to be bought and sold, or even given away. In a welfare state, we have moved very commendably in the direction of equalizing educational opportunity—your own university has been a national leader here—but there is nothing we can do about equalizing innate capacities for learning, and we are finding out that even the desires for learning are affected by some circumstances entirely outside the educational community.

Accordingly, it strikes me as being necessary to safeguard our institutions against all sorts of popular misconceptions about their potentials as reform agencies for offsetting inadequacies and failures that are traceable to other sources. As I have said elsewhere, not only are colleges and universities expected to transform young persons in attendance, but also to play key roles in uplifting the population at large. Whether it be the elimination of poverty and criminality, the reduction of unemployment, the improvement of cities, the uplift of morals, or the

placement of men on the moon, institutions of higher education are being drawn into a multitude of concerns.

Oblivious to Sidney Hook's dictum several years ago that "good works off campus cannot be a substitute for good works on campus," many students are being distracted from their primary obligation by outside interests. The outside involvements of professors are likewise causing increasing numbers of them to be charged with neglect of teaching. Administrative officers, too, find it difficult to resist a fragmentation of their time and energy.

While acknowledging many new obligations and opportunities for the university to be of wider service, I think we must be wary of letting any institution be pulled apart in the futile endeavor of trying to be all things to all men. Even our most affluent universities have limited resources, and they cannot simultaneously orient themselves to every conceivable discipline, much less to every possible mission. We do not give credit courses in every subject that interests some students or professors, and we cannot reasonably expect campus attention to be equally directed to all social problems.

If we saddle universities with responsibilities they cannot effectively discharge, or if we shift to them burdens more logically belonging to other agencies, we run the risk of distorting their basic purposes and splintering their effectiveness. In serving society, colleges and universities must not become subservient to it. Their highest utility is in their distinctive functions, and if they become unduly enmeshed as agencies of social welfare, these functions will be eroded. We must be on guard, therefore, against the inadvertent kind of mayhem which attenuates core purposes in a vast disarray of welfare services.

3. *The University as a Retreat.* Just as it is an illusion to expect too much from the university as a special community, so is it a delusion, in my opinion, to hold that its members may enjoy life in a kind of secular sanctuary where they have many rights but few duties. Perhaps I am too far beyond thirty to understand and appreciate the changed facts of academic life, but I will confess dismay over a currently circulated pronouncement on student rights and freedoms that has virtually nothing to say about duties and responsibilities. Also, I must say that it troubles me to see faculty members share in the ethos of mounting permissiveness to the extent that they stand passively by while some of our campuses are rife with disorder and violence.

Living as I do in the Georgetown section and working in the Dupont Circle area of the nation's capital, I have grown accustomed to looking at the wildest varieties of hippies and flower children, but I share Joseph Wood Krutch's view that they are certainly exercising the preroga-

tive of coming "as near as our society permits to freedom from moral imperative and the obligation to be socially useful." They and their other not very troublesome campus counterparts, it seems to me, ought to be more actively appreciative of their opportunities for learning and less indifferent to standards of decency, propriety, and service to others.

To paraphrase some thoughts of other concerned educators, I think we do ourselves and our institutions injury when we make private will into a sufficient justification for almost any act, when we regard individuals entirely as ends in themselves, and when we yield to the opinion that the whims of individual members of the academic community should be made into university mandates. The groves of academe, I submit, have not been carefully cultivated all these years as hideaways where everybody should be permitted to "turn on" in his own way!

Since I have an old fogy attitude in favor of upholding the university as a place to further higher learning rather than as a haven in which to further student contentment and staff tranquillity, I admit to being disturbed by a spreading permissiveness among the young fogies. For example, I have the old-fashioned notion that dormitories are not supposed to foster the kind of "togetherness" provided by motels. I do not find myself attuned to the trend toward pass-fail marking in all courses, or to the notion that the ideal faculty teaching load is no courses at all. I do not see the pertinence of self-expression and life-adjustment for courses in mathematics, science, and a whole range of other rigorous disciplines. Egalitarian proposals to junk credit hours and standards of accreditation suggest effects on later professional performance that I would not want as a doctor's patient or a lawyer's client.

In brief, I still hold that colleges and universities are the principal trustees of civilization, and that they cannot maintain this role and be environments where individuals are exempt from the consequence of their own action or inaction. Like George Kennan, I am distrustful of simply letting persons be guided by "inner voices," and of supporting our institutions of higher education as sanctuaries for the estranged, havens for the escapists, or withdrawal centers for those who disavow widely accepted and legitimized standards of aspiration and accomplishment.

4. *The University as an Arena.* Although the transmogrified university might retain some of its basic identity in spite of the debasements resulting from misconceptions I have mentioned up to this point, I doubt that it can survive if it is turned into a battleground or an arena. The arena, as you know, was originally a place where lions devoured unarmed Christians and gladiators fought to kill. Civilized society no longer

permits this kind of bestiality, but it is disturbing to learn of campus scenes of violence where the majority of the members of the academic community have been bemused spectators while defenders of the institution were in effect mauled and sometimes chewed to pieces by rapacious nihilists.

You share my alarm also, I trust, over the growing evidences that some members of academic communities are lining up as adversaries determined to impose their own wills on others through collective bargaining, power groupings, organized disruptions and obstructions, not to mention other tactics hitherto alien to the collegiate environment. Their proclaimed grievances range from complaints about local situations to protests about racial injustice and the war in Viet Nam.

The National Student Association reports that during only two months last year, 477 students were arrested and 1,728 faced disciplinary action as the result of demonstrations. To be sure, just 62 of our 2,300 campuses experienced such episodes and only 14,564 students—about two-tenths of 1 per cent of the 6,964,000 enrolled everywhere—had any involvement, but I still think that all of us should be concerned. "Happenings" in such places as Berkeley, San Francisco State, Madison, Iowa City, Cambridge, and other locales are danger signals not to be ignored. If you are inclined to brush aside the talk that some of the activists have a program and a national network, read the manifestoes of the Students for a Democratic Society or follow the actions of the Carmichaels who give cues to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Under Newton's third law of motion, however, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and it is beginning to look as if this law applies to abuses of the university. On my desk in Washington I have a growing stack of cogent declarations from embattled presidents and chancellors—some of whom are speaking out singly, and some in unison. There are also similar documents from trustees, and—I am especially pleased to observe—one from the American Association of University Professors. Even though it is unfortunate that so much time should have to be diverted from the main business of academia and given to riot prevention, it is gratifying to me to see that a stout defense of law and order is developing.

I am disturbed, on the other hand, by some tendencies very incisively described and analyzed in James A. Perkins' paper, "The University and Due Process," and want to quote from it as follows:

> If we are not to be legislated into total paralysis, there is nothing for it but that each of us goes to work to put the pieces of the community together again. Students and administrators will have to stop regarding each other as implacable enemies. For stu-

dents this will mean a recognition that they can't have it both ways: they can't ask for full participation in a community that they are systematically proceeding to destroy. And before students leap too quickly into the arms of civil law, they should be reminded that they will have to live with all the law, not just the parts they like. In such quasi-political matters as the draft, pornography, and discrimination, students may be subject to laws they don't like at all. He who appeals to the law for protection must be prepared to obey it.

For administrators it will mean a very hard look at all the rules and procedures by which their institutions live; quite possibly, it will also mean limbering up some very stiff attitudes about the role of students in academic affairs. And for faculty it will mean not only that they take the time to act as arbiters and to provide the balancing force, but that they reorder their work and give campus affairs a higher priority. A community of any kind is strong only to the extent that its members make the effort required to sustain and nourish it. We must all be willing to make the effort.

Should members of the academic community prove unable or unwilling to put their own houses in order and get on with the central enterprise, we can be certain that others will take over the controls, with students, faculty, administrators, and perhaps trustees all paying dearly for our failure to correct derelictions. I need not detail for you any of the outside controls that are already in the making here and there, or the possible recriminations in reduced financial support, increased political interferences, and other consequences we may prefer not to think about.

Where reform is needed—and there are few colleges and universities where some reform is not needed—I hope we can proceed through dialogue rather than negotiation and that all parties concerned will view themselves as partners rather than adversaries. I believe that change can be accomplished more effectively through orderly procedures than through explosive demonstrations and other extremes of action and reaction. In my judgment, the quality of university education in the United States is the best in the world, but it will be undermined and the public benefits of our institutions diminished if we permit mistaken ideas to become our models.

To be sure, one of the university's basic functions is to be a testing ground for ideas. It is not an authoritarian institution where behavior is expected to take the form of command and obedience. The competition of ideas on the campus necessarily produces tensions and countervailing forces, and this is a sign of vitality as contrasted to stagnation, but competition must not be allowed to degenerate into the kind of conflict that destroys academic freedom itself. Furthermore, in addition to

needing freedom, the university also must have the discipline and order required to maintain freedom.

We can preserve our academic freedoms if responsibilities are kept in balance with privileges, and if everybody concerned will think about duties alongside rights. We must all remember, moreover, that every college or university is much more in the public view than it once was. Its traditional immunity from undue outside interference implies a capacity for self-regulation and self-renewal, and if we are to protect this autonomy, all of us who really care must see that its integrity is upheld.

In conclusion, to you members of the Michigan State University graduating class I want to express the confidence that you will maintain a lifetime interest in your own outstanding University. The task of maintaining and improving higher education will not accomplish itself. As alumni and citizens you will have a continuing obligation to give your University in particular, and higher education in general, your informed understanding and active support. What happens *in* our colleges and universities may be of most immediate import for members of the academic community, but what happens *to* them is a matter in which every member of our society has a stake.